

Centre for Native Education Activity Report 1999-2000

INTRODUCTION

The year 1999-2000 for the Centre for Native Education at Concordia can best be characterized as "change but steady." Change in that only one of the four staff members had employment history with the Centre, and steady in the support and services provided to students. Its main objective was to continue to provide the quality of programs its coordinators had put into place.

STAFF AND PERSONNEL ISSUES

Manon Tremblay, the Co-ordinator for the Centre for Native Education took maternity leave from September to March, Karen Huska - student assistant - did not return for the school year, and Joel LaBillois' contract as student assistant came to an end at the beginning of September. Suzanne Bate continued with the Centre. Therefore, in September Clifton Nicholas and Geronimo Inutiq were both hired as student assistants.

Due to the maternity leave of the Co-ordinator for the Centre of Education it was necessary to find an interim co-ordinator. The Interim Co-ordinator was selected based on the following qualifications:

- ◆ More than 25 years of work experience in University systems within Student Services Departments
- ◆ Bachelor of science in Higher Education, Student Personnel Administration
- ◆ Proven administration skills
- ◆ A keen understanding of special needs of a "minority group"

- ◆ Experience in advising students
- ◆ Ability to develop trust
- ◆ 6 years experience as part time faculty with the Simone de Beauvoir Institute at Concordia

SERVICES, PROGRAMS, AND ACTIVITIES

SERVICES

One of the major roles of the Centre of Native Education under the direction of Advocacy and Support Services is to recruit Native students and offer and ensure their success at Concordia University. Assistance from Advocacy and Support Services were given generously to our staff in the form of legal advice, connections with other departments, interpretation of policies and procedures, making resources available to the centre, direction and moral support.

The Centre continued to offer the following services:

- ◆ Academic Advising
- ◆ Computer
- ◆ Documentation Centre
- ◆ Photocopying and Fax Machine
- ◆ Lounge and Study Space
- ◆ Listening and Referral
- ◆ Printed Information Materials

All these services were used on a daily basis and were essential in providing a sense of belonging to students and in supporting them academically and emotionally to succeed at Concordia.

A significant amount of time, particularly at the beginning of each semester, was spent working with Band leaders, faculty, and staff to assist students with registration. This is extremely important because it facilitates a process that could be frustrating for students.

Academic advising is also a much needed service. In most cases we have students who are the first in their families to attend University and they really need direction in planning, selecting, and managing their course loads. The assistance from Dr. Bill Reiner in the role of Academic Adviser was much appreciated. His Service and the advising done by the centre are pivotal in student retention.

Many of our students do not have **computers** at home and the Centre has been able to provide this technical support. The computers were used to access 'online' library catalogues, e-mail boxes, internet, and to type class reports and papers. This facility was used on a first come first serve basis which rarely posed a problem amongst the students. The computers allowed students to communicate with Indigenous communities in Canada and around the world.

We are in the process of adding a comprehensive list of online Website Services to our Centre's Website. This will help facilitate advertising, recruitment and promotion.

The **documentation centre** was not only used by Native students but was a much used service by the university population at large. This collection of books provided education, information and assistance for term papers, and a general awareness of First Nations culture to Natives and non-Natives. The centre would particularly like to thank the donors who gave generously to our Documentation Centre.

The students made use of the **photocopier**, the **fax, machine, study space**, and **lounge area**. While providing these services we took the opportunity to inform them of

events and happenings on campus. This also presented them with the chance to ask questions, clarify information, and to seek advice.

The *Annual Agenda* and monthly **Newsletter Arrowhead news** are both great sources of pride amongst the students. The newsletter is circulated throughout the university community and is both informative and in high demand. Even though there was an increase in the numbers of Agendas printed this year, we still were not able to fill all the requests for them. And students also asked for the monthly Newsletter oftentimes before it was printed.

DISCONTINUED SERVICES

Three services previously offered were not offered this year: After Hour Access, Income Tax Return Filing, and Arts and Crafts Workshops.

1) After School Access

This decision was taken because of security reasons and to circumvent discrimination complaints in light of the fact that access was given to students particularly known to the staff and not to the general Aboriginal student population. Other dilemmas surrounding this decision were establishing user need, staffing and managing. This issue will be revisited for the next school year.

2) Income Tax Return Filing

This service was not announced this year as Manon who provided this service in the past was absent and not able to extend this service to the general Native student population. It will most likely be renewed in the future.

2) The Arts and Craft Workshops

The workshops were not offered this year due to competing priorities and staff resources.

RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION

Recruitment and promotion included the following:

- ◆ The Concordia Thursday Report
- ◆ The Eastern Door
- ◆ The Nation
- ◆ Arrowhead News
- ◆ Pamphlets & Flyers
- ◆ Web Page
- ◆ CKUT interviews
- ◆ Concordia's 25th Annual Open House
- ◆ Student Services 60's Festival
- ◆ Dawson College Native Appreciation day

STUDENT VISITATION

Student visitation to the centre was lower this year. Factors that we observed that affected students visits to the centre were:

- ◆ A record 44 graduates last year, many whom made up the regular population who used the centre on a regular basis
- ◆ Peer conflict
- ◆ Administration and student disagreement

The centre is in the process of compiling statistics.

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

September

1) Orientation

The school year activities started with our **Orientation Breakfast Week**. This activity had several goals: 1) to welcome students 2) to introduce them to services provided by both the university and by the Centre of Native Education 3) to help them combat loneliness and isolation. Each morning this informal session began around eleven o'clock and students were given information regarding our services, procedures, university policies, and special dates to remember. Pamphlets, booklets, flyers, newsletters, and other printed information were given to all that attended. This informal method seemed to be an effective way of providing orientation for academic life at Concordia. The breakfast went over so well that a monthly breakfast was instituted at the Centre. Students prepared their bagels, toast, and as usual this was an opportunity to start a spontaneous discussion centred around politics, academics, Concordia, and life in general. It was also an excellent opportunity to publicize events. Establish the community within the Concordia community and to encourage students to participate in student life programs and attend main events sponsored by the university.

2) Training

A "How To" training session was presented by Suzanne to new student assistants. This session included a presentation on forms, procedures, policies, and office equipment. Added to that training was information regarding office expectations and customer Service and importance of confidentiality. A "front line" resource book was made available to them and

they were informed that the Advocacy and Support Services Office was there to assist them with any questions, problems that may arise.

2) Information Session

Tracy Diabo from the House of First People McGill along with the Law and Faculty Department held an information session aimed at encouraging students to apply to McGill's Law School. It was very poorly attended. It is recommended that there be a discussion as to whether to discontinue this yearly session or co-ordinate it with the Political Science department.

October

- 1) The Centre supported the Kecia Larkin Lecture in the AIDS/HIV Lecture Series. Ms. Larkin presented a lecture on being a Native woman living with HIV. It was an excellent presentation and all in attendance were impressed with the style in which she delivered her message.
- 2) A second staff workshop which included the peer support group was given. The topic "Conflict Resolution" was much needed, well attended, and appreciated. The time (Friday afternoon) at which it was presented was not ideal and will be reviewed.
- 3) We participated in the Student Services Festival ; A fun event and A number of people did stop to enquire about our services. The event was worth while.

November

- 1) Dr. Jolene Richard from the University of Buffalo, New York presented two lectures: I) "Many Views of Haudenosaunee Women" and II) "Across

Borders: Beadwork in Iroquois Life.” This event was spearheaded by the House of First People at McGill University with collaboration efforts and support from the McCord Museum, Air Canada, and our Centre for Native Education. The art work was marvellous and the event well attended.

- 2) The Centre supported the Indigenous People's International presentation of the Film “Smoke Signals.” We also encourage students to support this worthy student organization.

December

- 1) The annual Christmas Party was a success. Students and their families were invited for the occasion. It was well attended and included eight children. All the children received gifts and the Centre was jumping with joy and laughter
- 2) Attention turned to preparation for Y2K. Computers were secured, refrigerators cleaned, and all appliances unplugged. A thorough cleaning of the office was made and we waited for the “uneventful” event of the year 2000.

January

- 1) This was a busy time with preparation for the “Dialogue and Diversity Conference” (January 24th – 28th). The Centre played a primary role in the organizing and implementation of this successful conference.
- 2) It was a major undertaking that required attention and preparation during most of the fall semester. We spearheaded three of the workshops for the week.
- 1) “Is There a Common Aboriginal Culture?” A panel discussion facilitated by

Corrine Jetté from the Engineering and Computer Science Department. The panellists were Joel LaBillois, former staff member of the Centre, Geronimo Inutiq, student assistant for the Centre, and Phillip Deering and Delores La Pratt-Houseman, both students at Concordia. This was an excellent presentation and well attended. Evaluations were very positive.

- 2) Diversity and Frontline Services at Concordia was a great success (standing room only), well attended, with excellent evaluation and recommendations that more training in this area be done. The Office of the Registrar, the Black Community Resource Centre, and Consult-Action assisted our Centre of Native Education in the planning and implementation of this event.
- 3) Ellen Gabriel, human rights activist from Kanehsatake was a guest lecturer for the Conference. Her lecture and discussion centred around Aboriginal socialization and politics. It was both informative and thought provoking.

February

February was a very busy month. Many events that targeted "Black History Month" took on an additional point of view with the Centre's presence. Following is a brief summary of some of these events.

- 1) Guest speaker for the Canadian Catholic Women Society. An event where the main theme was Black women's culture but First Nation women's concerns were also addressed.
- 2) We co-facilitated discussions on spirituality at Cowansville Correctional Institution and Leclerc Correctional Services. The targeted audience were Blacks, Natives, and Latinos and other young men of colour. The program included poetry, singing, basketball, food, and open discussions. As a

result of February interactions with these groups, organizations in the Black community have decided to organize visits with the inmates on a regular basis.

- 3) Two radio interviews were done with CKUT. Both interviews centred around the similarities of needs of Natives and Blacks. It was also an opportunity to publicize the Centre's services and events.
- 4) The Centre was involved with facilitating a workshop at McGill where high school students from the Montreal region were in attendance. We took the opportunity to promote the centre and Concordia's programs.
- 5) A presentation was made during the high school assembly at Riverside High School in Lasalle. Again the Centre and Concordia were promoted. Questions in regard to our services were responded to as well as phone numbers and pamphlets given to interested students.

March

Performance evaluations were done on each staff member. They were positive experiences where feedback was given on their attitude and work performance. This was also an opportunity to discuss each one's professional and academic goals.

CONCLUSION

It was a pleasure and an honour to serve as the Interim Coordinator for the Centre this academic school year. The trust and support from the Director of Advocacy and Support Services and from the Coordinator of the Centre for Native Education

were very much appreciated. The students, staff, and the Native Community organizations responded well to the Centre's request. Collectively these people made 1999-2000 a success.

Brenda Rowe
Interim Coordinator
Centre for Native Education